

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP



A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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POPULAR STORY-PAPERS OF OTHER DAYS

By G. Cordier

The writer of the following article, a man somewhat advanced in years, stood recently in front of one of the present day newsstands and, as he looked over the publications spread out before him, he contrasted them with what he saw on the newsstands in the days of his youth.

Like Francis Villon's famous poem, "Where Are the Snows of Yester-years?" So, where are the great story-papers of former days? Gone, gone, forever, never to return. Now-a-days it is magazines and magazines exclusively. We have them of all kinds, sorts and descriptions; terror magazines, weird magazines, detective magazines, aeroplane magazines, Astounding magazines, Western magazines and many others; a list too long to enumerate; but of story-papers not a single one. In the words of an old-time song "They are gone where the wood-bine twineth," these places know them no more.

It is the purpose of the writer to endeavor, to the best of his ability, to give some little account of the great story-papers that were immensely popular in his boyhood days; and whose place on the newsstands has been usurped by the present day magazines.

One feature the old-time story-papers have in common with their successors in the modern display windows is that they both reflect the taste in reading and the spirit of these days.

In the old days, when the present mechanical wonders were unknown, the stock and trade of a story-writer comprised first, The West, Indians, Covered Wagons, Outlaws, the Discovery of Lost Mines and the picturesque and dramatic Mexican border Second; the Sea-Old Whaling Days; Pirates of the East and West Indies and thrilling Desert Islands episodes; together with tales of the exploitation of unknown lands, and the hideous and abominable Slave Trade. Besides all this, the old time writer could draw on the whole romantic and colorful period of the Mediaval Ages, with its tall castles and knights in armor and all the incidents of feudal warfare. Stories on all of the above subjects were exceedingly popular, and also tales of Aristocratic life in the stately homes of England, and the abodes of wealth in our own land.

All of the above are now things of the past. The writer looking over the magazines of popular literature of the present time is struck with the fact that they likewise reflect the popular taste in reading of the present day, which is a distinctly mechanical one—and the old-time stories would find little favor with readers of modern fiction, who care only for tales of wonderful inventions and weird romances of journeys into interplanetary space.

The grotesque horror stories that now fill the pages of certain magazines were almost unknown in bygone days, and such that were written were by authors of great genius, such as Fitz-James O'Brien, Thomas DeQuincey or Edgar Allan Poe. While the

detective story was well represented in the popular literature of the past; still it did not have the prominence, nor was it given the place accorded to it now.

Of the modern story magazines, at least half appear to be devoted to detection fiction or stories of gangsters and the underworld, and the struggle of the forces of justice against the criminal in his war against the laws.

The writer will now try to do his best to describe and give an accurate account of the great story-papers he read and enjoyed in the days of Long Ago.

They were the years from 1860 to 1900 that saw the great story-papers at the time of their glory, and their greatest popularity. Those were the days of the great sheets, twenty-one inches long by fourteen wide. Their great size made them very difficult to handle, and when bound into a volume of fifty-two numbers were quite a load; needing a support of some kind to rest upon while the reader perused the pages. The writer has quite a number of volumes of the old time publications, and he finds it quite a problem to read them; their size and weight make them very awkward to handle which somewhat curtails the pleasure he finds in reading them and following the thrilling serials that fill the columns of their pages.

Notwithstanding the drawback of their great size, the old story-papers were immensely popular, and were eagerly read by the story loving public; immense editions were struck off presses to supply the constantly increasing demand.

Taking first rank, and holding the premier position, as leader of all the story-papers of the times was Robert Bonner's New York *Ledger*. This celebrated publication was extraordinarily successful in winning the affections of the story-paper reading masses, and counted its readers in the tens of thousands. It was a truly family story-paper. In its fascinating pages appeared tales and serials of every description; the products of the pens of the most noted story writers of the period. In its columns captivating serials took their course from week to week, eagerly devoured by the *Ledger's* myriad readers who,

charmed and enchanted by the bewitching stories, could hardly bear to wait from one week to another until he could get the next installment of some especially engrossing romances. The writer's mother has told him how her sister (the writer's aunt) and herself fought each other to see who would get the paper first to read, as soon as the postman had delivered their copy of the *Ledger*, it ending generally by their dividing the paper in half so that each would have part to read at the same time.

The *Ledger* was noted for the superior quality of its literature and the prominence of its staff of writers. The paper spared no expense or effort to attract talent, and paid large sums to the most celebrated of its contributors. Such well-known names as Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., Prof. W. H. Peck, Mrs. E. Dupey and many others, and above all, the illustrious and celebrated Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, who may be said to have been the most noted of all the story writers of the time. Mrs. Southworth's stories of life in our country in the days immediately preceding the Civil war were read by delighted thousands, and greatly increased the prestige of the *Ledger*.

As in the case of the Dime Novels that in former years were despised as vulgar trash, now they are being sought after by eager collectors, it having been found by the critics that the dime novel, in depicting the great West, of the days of the covered wagon, the Indians and the buffalo; they gave a truer picture of those heroic days than most of the labored efforts of modern romancers; so likewise Mrs. Southworth has come into her own; her stories of life in our country in the years shortly before the Fraternal Conflict give a more faithful and accurate description of conditions in those distant days than has ever been penned by present-day story-writers. Mrs. Southworth's stories had their scenes mostly laid in the South. Her description of life in that section of our country in the days of slavery are highly interesting; and present a picture of society and life in the days of servitude that are inconceivable to us at the present time.

It is incredible to our modern ideas that it was ever possible that human

Following The Boys of England, on January 29, 1868, a new paper, The Young Men of Great Britain made its appearance. This paper was much of the same character as The Boys of England. The first story in its pages was The Night Guard, or The Secret of the Five Masks, an historical story.

Both these papers were immensely successful and were well received in all parts of the English-speaking world. Their proprietor, Edwin J. Brett, published numerous other papers and libraries, the two most important being The Boys' Comic Journal and Our Boys' Journal. Writers of great talent wrote the stories, tales and romances that filled their pages, while their illustrations were of high artistic merit, being pictures of great power, force and originality.

The two first named papers were particularly noted for their historical stories. Such titles as The Cowled Eleven, or The Hunch-back of Old St. Pauls; The Brazen Mask, or The Free Foresters of Dartmoor; The King's Scholar, or The Blucoast Boys of Old London, and Clubs and Staves, or The Prince and Apprentice, aided by graphic illustrations, filled the columns of their pages.

Schoolboy stories were also a distinguishing feature of the two papers. We give, for example, the three following titles: Jack-O-Lantern, or The Imp of the School; The Boys of Hawkhouse School and Young Pickwick's Schooldays; stories with a central character, who passed through numerous adventures in a long series of volumes first originated in The Boys of England and The Young Men of Great Britain.

One of the most popular of these characters was Ned Nimble, and we have Ned Nimble, or The Pupils of Pickleton Priory; Ned Nimble Among the Indians, or The Secret of the Phantom Cave; Ned Nimble Among the Mormons; Ned Nimble Among the Pirates; Ned Nimble Among the Tartars and Ned Nimble Among the Bushrangers.

We have already noted the Harkaway American series, and we will now take a glance at the original English series, the long list of which commenced with Jack Harkaway's Schooldays in The Boys of England. This was followed by Harkaway

After Schooldays, Harkaway at Oxford, Harkaway Among the Brigands and Harkaway Around the World.

Another favorite character, dear to the hearts of youthful readers, was Dick Lightheart, who commenced his career in 1873 in Brett's Young Men of Great Britain also on December 4, 1878, in the pages of Our Boys' Journal. Dick, like his more famous predecessor, was the hero of marvelous experiences; only in his case they were of a more startling nature and tragic description when, after running away from school, he is shipwrecked and taken on a voyage in a wonderful submarine boat, and subsequently on a journey to the center of the earth.

The whole amazing succession of adventures being related in Heming's graphic style, he being the author of both series of novels.

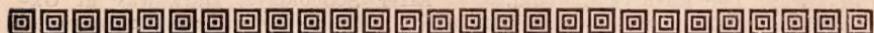
The stories published in The Boys of England and the other Edwin J. Brett Publications were not only exceeding popular in England but also in our own land; and taking advantage of this fact both the Tousey Company and Frank Leslie reprinted many of them in The Boys of New York and in Leslie's Boys & Girls Weekly.

The Tousey Company published a library called The Great Five Cent Wide Awake Library, in which at least one-third of the stories were taken from the Edwin J. Brett story-papers, and other English publications.

In closing his article, the writer begs to present the following beautiful lines, taken from a poem written in commemoration of a famous story - writer:—

Jack Harkaway! Jack Harkaway!
The author's heart lies still,
And voiceless now this many a year
His gallant English quill;
And nowhere on the starry peaks
And pinnacles of Fame
Has time a proud memorial raised
To Bracebridge Heming's name;
Put could each boy that he endeared
To that lone grave repair;
In fond remembrance piously
To drop one blossom there;
A mountain, beautiful and sweet
Of flowers would hide the clay
Where moulders in the dust, the hand
That wrote Jack Harkaway.

—THE END—



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